



DARLINGTON
Borough Council

**ECONOMY AND PUBLIC
PROTECTION**
DARLINGTON PARTNERSHIPS
Town Hall, Darlington DL1 5QT

(01325) 405000
Date 12 October 2026

Our ref:
Your ref:
Please ask for: Seth Pearson
Document Name: Schools In-Reach

Dear Parent/Carer,

Changes to Free School Meal Holiday Vouchers and New Support for Families

Over recent years, Darlington Borough Council has been able to provide supermarket vouchers during school holidays for families with children eligible for Free School Meals through funding received from the Household Support Fund and, more recently, the Crisis and Resilience Fund. However, updated guidance from the Department for Work and Pensions means this funding can no longer be used to provide holiday food vouchers. As a result, the voucher scheme has ended with immediate effect.

We understand that many families have found this support helpful and appreciate that this change may be disappointing. While holiday vouchers have been provided in Darlington for several years, they were funded through discretionary government grants, not all local authorities offered similar schemes, including some neighbouring councils.

To ensure families continue to receive support, the Council has worked closely with Citizens Advice Darlington, Redcar & Cleveland (CADRC) to develop a new approach focused on providing practical advice, advocacy and longer-term support to help families improve their financial wellbeing.

Through the new Schools In-Reach Project, specialist advisers will provide support with:

- Maximising household income and benefits
- Managing debt and financial difficulties
- Housing issues
- Energy costs and fuel poverty
- Employment and training opportunities
- Accessing wider sources of support and assistance

The aim of the service is to help families address the underlying causes of financial hardship and build greater financial resilience for the future.

Although the project will initially be delivered through selected primary schools, support will be available to families across Darlington, including those with children attending secondary schools. In the meantime, a universal crisis support offer remains available to all Darlington residents who require assistance.

Support can be accessed through Citizens Advice Darlington, Redcar & Cleveland (CADRC) online, by telephone and at their town centre office.

Support can be accessed:

- **In person:** at The CORE, Church Row, Darlington DL1 5QD
 - Drop-in sessions, Monday to Friday, 10am-12pm (excluding bank holidays)
 - Financial Crisis Support Team, Monday to Friday 10am- 1pm and 2pm-4pm (excluding bank holidays)
- **By telephone:**
 - Adviceline **0808 278 7953** Monday to Friday 9.30am-4.30pm (excluding bank holidays)
 - Financial Crisis Support Team, **0800 058 4055**, Monday to Friday 10am- 1pm and 2pm-4pm (excluding bank holidays)
- **Online:**
 - <https://www.citizensadvisedrc.org.uk/services/crisis-and-resilience-fund>

If you are worried about your finances or would like advice on the support available to you, please contact your school or Citizens Advice Darlington, Redcar & Cleveland (CADRC) for further information.

Yours sincerely



Seth Pearson
Director Darlington Partnerships